

*Remarks to the
East Mississippi Business Development Council
September 10, 2002*

Good morning – it’s great to be here with you today. We’re in an interesting period in our state and our nation – it’s like the opening lines of Charles Dickens’ “A Tale of Two Cities” – “it was the best of times, it was the worst of times.”

The challenge for us is how we capitalize on the good work we’re doing and use the momentum to make the changes we still need to make.

In my State of the State address last January, I laid out four priorities for our state – jobs, education, health care and public safety. All very different priorities, but all dependent on each other for our ultimate success.

And, the cooperation and partnerships we build together will help determine our success in putting these priorities into action.

Look at the recent Nissan expansion – an expansion of their facility in Canton by 1 million square feet and 1,300 jobs to accommodate the production of the Altima sedan.

This \$500 million investment is being made because Nissan wants to build their best car in their best plant.

The ripple effect from this expansion will be felt around the state.

An economic impact study on the first phase of the Nissan project, conducted by the Goodman Group at USM, found that for every job at the Nissan plant, four more will be created in support areas.

With Nissan's Tier 1 suppliers locating around the state – construction is already underway in Vicksburg, Forest, Tupelo, Canton and Greenville – the impact of this expansion will be felt in many communities around the state.

And, as the other support facilities begin to move in, even more jobs will be created – jobs that will help put food on the table, clothes on the back and a roof over the head.

I'm proud of what we've been able to do with this project and the hundreds of other expansions in Mississippi, especially in the midst of a national recession. I'm also proud of the message this growth sends about the business climate in our state.

There's an old saying that "many an opportunity is lost because of time spent looking for four-leaf clovers."

Not here. We're always looking for opportunities and, in the times when we don't see them, we're creating them. That's how we're moving Mississippi ahead.

For all the publicity surrounding the Nissan project, however, the expansion of jobs around the state has been occurring on a regular basis. We've been creating jobs in the midst of a national recession, something that we can look to with pride.

We may not be able to control what's happening on Wall Street in New York, but we can work as hard as possible to affect what happens on Highway 19 in Meridian. The work we do with a small business is just as important as the work we do with a company like Nissan.

We've had great success in places like Monticello, Nettleton and Magnolia. We've helped businesses locate and expand in Greenwood and Prentiss. Whether it's 10 jobs or 1,000 jobs, the effort we put into building communities and towns benefits the entire state. And we are anticipating that Mississippians will make up 97 percent of the workforce for Nissan.

There is an on-going effort to sell Mississippi to new businesses, and I want to thank you for the role each of you, as Mississippians, play in that process.

At every level across the state, the recruitment process never stops, and it is important for us to be ready to go anywhere in the world to promote the state.

It is in growing our existing businesses, however, that we will always experience our greatest success, and the numbers in this category speak for themselves.

Over the course of the past two years, over 23,000 new jobs have been created in the state. Of those jobs, more than 18,000 came from the expansion of existing businesses.

Looking back to this past January, here's a snapshot of what's been done: Northrop Grumman Ship Systems in Harrison County added 520 new jobs. Lane Home Furnishings in Lee County added 400 new jobs.

The Alcoa plant in DeSoto County was targeted for closure, but we worked with the company and convinced them to stay. The end result was an expansion of their facility through a \$17 million capital investment and 200 additional jobs.

When Whirlpool was looking to consolidate its operations, it decided to close facilities in Canada and other areas and expand its operation in Oxford. The \$10 million capital investment there led to 150 new jobs.

Hart & Cooley just took over a facility in Olive Branch, saving 85 jobs and creating another 300. And, they chose that location over others in Alabama and North Carolina.

I always tell my fellow governors to watch out, because I'm going to work as hard as I can to take jobs away from them and bring them to Mississippi.

The list goes on, but for the first two months of this year alone, 60 companies expanded their facilities. These expansions represented a total capital investment of more than \$286 million and 1,204 jobs.

Again, this is strong evidence about the business climate in Mississippi.

The work of growing Mississippi doesn't stop, even during a national recession. When times are tough, that's when we have our chance to show what we can do.

That's when we use one of the best economic development tools in the nation – the Advantage Mississippi Initiative. With its aggressive and ambitious design, this initiative has gained attention for the work it's already done in its short life – work that goes far beyond the Nissan project.

Small towns across the state are benefiting from the Small Municipalities Program, which helps strengthen the infrastructure growth necessary for economic development, such as drainage systems, roads, bridges and land acquisition.

The Growth and Prosperity Program helps build counties in economically challenged areas by offering incentives to companies to locate in those areas.

And, with the recent good work of the Water and Sewer Task Force, we have a new road map for building an even stronger infrastructure for new and expanding businesses.

The message is out to the rest of the world –
Mississippi's open for business.

The other priorities I mentioned are also vital to building Mississippi. In education, it is so important for us to adequately fund it at the state level, rather than shifting unfunded mandates to the counties and communities.

Out of our \$3.5 billion budget, I believe we can find a way to make education a stronger cornerstone for Mississippi's foundation.

There's one last point I want to make regarding what's been happening at the Capitol during this special session.

I began meeting with doctors across the state in the spring, and they told me their number one concern is the rising cost of medical malpractice insurance. My office has been working to address the issues of cost and availability.

When I laid out the call for this special session, I was very clear in the issues to be addressed. The call to the Legislature was simple – pass legislation resolving the medical malpractice crisis in Mississippi, and I will expand the call to include general civil justice reform.

The success of our state – the success of our people – is determined by the network of minds and manpower we develop around Mississippi. You are at the core of that network, and the work you do helps keep it strong.

Earlier, I mentioned the saying about four-leaf clovers. The bottom line is this: We're not spending our time looking for four-leaf clovers. We'll leave that to somebody else. There are too many opportunities for us to create on our own.

It's the best of times, it's the worst of times. The challenges are there for us – and we're up to the task.

I appreciate the work you do each day to create those opportunities in your counties, and I look forward to working with you to keep building Mississippi. Thank you.

